

Oh, Deer

In Montgomery, a vote to thin the herd

DEER HUNTING season in Montgomery County just became a little more lethal for the deer. County Council members, intent on curbing collisions and protecting crops, have tipped the scales in favor of hunters who will now have a freer hand to blast away at the creatures, which, while comely, are maligned in the deer-hating blogosphere as possessing all the charm and social utility of large rats.

Police report some 2,000 run-ins each year between deer and vehicles in the county; an equal or greater number may go unreported. The resulting wreckage, carnage and cost is no light matter; a deer that tried to bolt the Beltway not long ago left George L. Leventhal, a Democratic member of the council, badly hurt. Tightly regulated hunting over the past few years has barely dented the toll in crashes and injuries. That, plus the growing prevalence of Lyme disease (borne by ticks on deer) and the constant ire of farmers, prompt-

ed the council's more decisive step.

Under the new rules, which will take effect next year, hunters will be able to fire shotguns and muzzle-loading guns, though not rifles, at deer within 50 yards of a road — not only in the rural third of the county known as the agricultural reserve but elsewhere, too. The hunts must take place well away from dwellings and offices, but they will be allowed on smaller parcels — 50 acres — than they previously were, and with simpler permitting procedures.

The council deliberated for no less than two years before acting, and it solicited more input from citizens than its first public hearing produced. Mr. Leventhal, still healing from his accident, joined in the unanimous verdict after he publicly searched his soul for anti-deer bias and, finding none, decided against recusing himself from voting to thin the herd. If vengeance was at work, it was the county's collectively.